



City of Austin

Communications and Public Information Office

301 W. Second St., Austin, TX 78701

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Doug Matthews, Chief Communications Director

DATE: February 6, 2017

SUBJECT: Council Resolution No. 20161103-052 – Progress Report

Pursuant to Council Resolution No. 20161103-52 (related to the City’s Language Access Program), we are pleased to provide you with our first progress update on the project. As a reminder, the Resolution included three core requests and/or desired outcomes of the City Manager:

1. City departments comply with language access guidance issued by federal agencies.
2. Create a stakeholder team to develop a “Language Access Implementation Plan” and collaborate with other local public agencies to achieve efficiencies in the provision of language access services.
3. Develop “Language Access Procedures” for each City department that interacts with the public and prioritize departments that most frequently come into direct contact with the public.

In addition to the resolution, the Office of the City Auditor released an audit report on the City’s language access efforts in June 2016. The report found that while efforts had been made to provide language assistance services to Austin residents, the City may not be meeting the needs of all residents. As we indicated in the staff response to that audit, we agree and have been working diligently to improve the City’s performance in regard to language access.

This is the first time the City of Austin has taken a long-term, systemic approach toward this issue. As such, the Communications and Public Information Office (CPIO) is taking this opportunity to establish a sustainable framework citywide, and using this opportunity to provide City management and the City Council with a clear idea of what structures and funding may be required to sustain a program in to the future.



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Progress Update

To improve the ability to provide access to City programs and information for residents with limited English proficiency (LEP), CPIO has partnered with other City departments, City leadership and community members to identify areas for improved service delivery.

Efforts already underway include website development that will feature common City of Austin terminology and essential documents in multiple languages. CPIO is also exploring translation and interpretation services that take into account cultural nuances of Austin residents.

Language Access Guidance

All City departments have assigned language access coordinators to attend mandatory training during January and February. The training will guide departments through the development of a language access plan and provide recommendations on how to address service needs for limited English proficient residents. As departmental language access plans are completed, they will be placed on a web-based language access portal. The portal will include other language access resources, such as document and terminology banks. Completion of these plans will ensure all City departments receiving federal assistance are in compliance with Executive Order 13166, “Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency.”

Stakeholder Teams

Staff has established two internal stakeholder groups, an external stakeholder group and is also actively participating in a community-based workgroup hosted by the Community Advancement Network. Each of these groups has met multiple times over the past several months.

- Staff Working Group – Multi-departmental group working together to identify service gaps and strategies to improve language access.
- Executive Leadership Team – Representatives from City Manager’s Office, Law Department, Human Resources Department and public safety departments established to review progress and provide direction.
- External Working Group – Members of quality of life commissions, refugee and immigrant service organizations, language justice groups and other members of the public. The group has discussed challenges and opportunities in several aspects of language access in an effort to create solutions.

The City of Austin is committed to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Reasonable modifications and equal access to communications will be provided upon request.



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- Community Advancement Network Language Access Working Group – Multiple community agencies collaborating to create efficiency and consistency in improving language access in Austin. The group includes agencies such as Capital Metro, Austin Independent School District, Travis County and others.

Language Access Procedures

Departmental self-assessments of language needs will help develop consistent procedures across the city. The assessment process will establish the proportion of limited English proficient persons likely to be served as well as the frequency of need. This data will provide a better picture of resource needs and allocation. In addition to departmental efforts, staff has conducted research to establish best practices from other communities of similar sizes with diverse language needs. This has included research in providing quality translation and interpretation services. All of these efforts combined will ensure the City's services are provided in such a way that provides meaningful access for all.

Contracts for Service

To provide consistent, reliable and culturally appropriate translation services, staff is developing a solicitation for multiple vendors for translation services (to include a minimum of Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese). Part of the request for qualifications will include a testing for cultural competency, and preference for local vendors. In addition to translation contracts, staff will review existing contracts for interpretation and language line services.

Critical Documents

As departments evaluate services and establish language access plans, there is an opportunity to identify documents critical to their programs and services. Per the recommendation of the Asian American Quality of Life Commission, Council allocated a one-time funding source to the Communications and Public Information Office. That one-time funding will assist in translating critical documents into the appropriate languages. This process will happen concurrent to the development of the plans. Once in place, the plans will outline a more sustainable process for providing documents in the appropriate languages.

Additional Activities

In addition to departmental plans, staff is evaluating ongoing training opportunities for employees receiving a bilingual stipend. A local organization has developed community and medical interpreting courses that would provide continued professional development for stipend recipients. This training would refine interpretation skills and create consistency in terminology. Also, consistent with recommendations from the 2016 audit,



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staff has developed a job profile for a language access coordinator and is considering a temporary hire in that position for the remainder of the fiscal year.

Over the next few months, City departments will take the knowledge gained from the language access training, and begin their needs assessments. This process will provide timely assistance in identifying resource gaps during the business planning process. Concurrently, CPIO staff will coordinate efforts to establish citywide resources and work with community organizations to evaluate opportunities for collaboration.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

CC: Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager
Ray Baray, Chief of Staff
Brion Oaks, Chief Equity Officer